

PSY221 Visiting lecturer

Being online in perspectives of communication studies and psychology

Andra Siibak (PhD candidate): Tartu University : Institute of Journalism and Communication (Estonia)

prof. Alexander E. Voiskounsky: Lomonosov Moscow State University - Department of Psychology (Russia)

Dates of lecturers:

Andra Siibak: 6th Nov., 13th Nov., 20th Nov., 11th Dec.: 8.00-9.40 (No. of classroom P22)

Alexander E. Voiskounsky: 1st Dec.:10.00-11.40 (AVC classroom), 13.00-13.45 (aula)
3rd Dec.: 16.00-17.40 (AVC classroom), 18.00-18.45 (AVC classroom)

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Course description:

Lectures given by Andra Siibak:

1. Visual self presentation on social networking sites – „the real“ versus „the ideal“

The lecture will analyse the methods young people use in order to construct their gender identity on the photos of Rate, the most popular social networking site (SNS) in Estonia. Results of several studies (Siibak 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008) will be presented in order to give an overview of the trends the youngsters use in the hope of gaining popularity among the other users of the website. Furthermore, my aim is also to show what aspects of the self young people would like to emphasise on the photos accompanying their profiles in SNS and what is considered to be crucial by the 12-17 year olds` in order to become popular among one`s peers in the online community. Ideas of Erving Goffman from the book „Presentation of Self in Everyday Life“ (1959) and the self-discrepancy theory of Higgins (1987) are used as a starting point in order to introduce the habits of self-monitoring and self-presentation in the online environments. The lecture will also introduce the methods and theories of e.g. Goffman (1979), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Umiker-Sebeok (1996), Kang (1997), and Bell (2001), that were used for analysing the photos found on the SNS.

Preferred reading:

Siibak, Andra (2007a). Reflections of RL in the Virtual World. *Cyberpsychology*, Available from www.cyberpsychology.eu

2. Gender-specific styles of self presentation in the Internet

The lecture will analyse different aspects of the self-produced virtual body that is made up of different textual as well as visual elements becomes a centre of attention while communicating in the virtual worlds. The aspects like one`s nickname and avatar selection, netspeak use and profile creation all function in order to give birth to the virtual body.

Special emphasis is laid on the gender differences in constructing those virtual personas because although one is allowed to adopt whatever identity one chooses in virtual environments, studies have shown that men and women still tend to present themselves with the help of stereotypical gendered codes, that is, their virtual identities contain a number of attributes that are thought to be sought by the opposite sex. These gendered scripts that are used for constructing the virtual selves are formed according to the prevailing values and norms of the society. Textual and visual profiles in SNS as well as selection of nicknames and avatars and differences in netspeak will be used as examples of gendered performances in the Internet.

Preferred reading:

Scheidt, Lois Ann (2001) Avatars and Nicknames in Adolescent Chat Spaces. *Gender and Computerisation*.

3. Social networking sites as a new online playground

The short theoretical overview of young children`s role-play and identity construction in online environments is based upon the ideas of Lemke (2003), Moreno (1953) and Corsaro (1992). Based on Lemke (2003) I shall argue that young children use two different kinds of identity behavior in social networking sites: "identity-in-practice" (also known as "identity-in-the-moment") and "identity-across-timescales" that are both inextricably linked. Furthermore, we can often see that Moreno`s ideas of psychodrama and sociodrama hold also in children`s online communication: children may "push" a communicative act in a certain direction (sexual tension, obscenity) until they feel that they can control the situation. Adults, however, are often not prepared to understand the meaning of online relations in children`s identity development and may, thus, be unable to act as the "director" or facilitator in sociodramas or psychodramas children play in online environments.

The findings from focus group interviews with teachers and parents are used in order to explain how the adults perceive young children`s identity play online and what kind of function (if any) do they attribute to online social networking in forming children`s personality, identity and habitus. The responses of adults are compared to the results of the questionnaire survey among 11 to 12 year-old

schoolchildren and several interviews made with the same age-group in order to illustrate the children's experiences .

Preferred reading:

Corsaro, William A (1992) Interpretive Reproduction in Children's Peer Cultures. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, Special Issue: Theoretical Advances in Social Psychology, (Jun., 1992), pp. 160-177 Published by: American Sociological Association. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2786944>

4. Generation C - trapped in structured spaces?

I proceed from the theoretical notion of structure and agency (cf. Giddens, 1984) by assuming that youngsters' content creation practices are, on the one hand, enabled and encouraged by existing online spaces and communities and, on the other hand, regulated and constrained by built-in structures as well as social norms and expectations that prevail in those spaces and communities. Young people, thus, may be engaged in two types of discursive practices: contributing to reproducing existing norms and discourses both online and offline, and modifying those discourses by inventing new forms and conventions of self-expression and social interaction. Moreover, content creation practices and types of content creators can be described and ordered by the axis of structuredness - creativeness.

Another axis that I apply in our analysis is activeness - passiveness. My focus is laid on "Generation C" where the letter "C" stands, in the first instance, for "content creation" as well as for "creativity" more generally (cf. Bruns, 2005).

I use the data derived from a questionnaire survey carried out in comprehensive schools in three Estonian cities (Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu) in autumn 2007 (N= 713) among 12 to 17 year-old pupils. The available indicators enable me to analyze also reasons for being (not) engaged in creative online activities, elements of content considered more important by teenagers, as well as their opinions about the Internet and norms of online behavior. Data collected by the EU Kids Online network is used as a complimentary and illustrative material in order to discuss about the user generated content creation practices among young people all around Europe.

Preferred reading:

Bruns, Axel. (2006) "Towards Producers: Futures for User-Led Content Production." In *Proceedings: Cultural Attitudes towards Communication and Technology 2006*, eds. Fay Sudweeks, Herbert Hrachovec, and Charles Ess. Perth: Murdoch University, 2006. 275-84.

Lectures given by Alexander Voiskounsky:

Cyberpsychology: an Overview

Cyberpsychology, aka psychology of cyberspace, is a totally new field which has emerged recently parallel to the accelerated development of information & communication technologies (ICT), in more simple terms - computers and digital telecommunications. The name "cyberpsychology" is not broadly accepted within diverse expert communities of psychologists; neither special university departments

have been organized, nor – which is worse – mono-thematic professional association has been registered; few scholar journals are known in the field (including the one located in Brno); finally, qualified researchers devoted to this line of studies are not numerous. This new field, nevertheless, enjoys popularity among younger generations – all those who have been recently called “born digital”, including psychology students.

Cyberpsychology is neighboring several disciplines outside psychology, sharing with them resources, methods and explanatory schemes. The closest disciplines are “Human-Computer Interaction” (or “Computer-Human Interaction”, which is about the same) and Communication Science; less close disciplines are numerous and include for example cultural anthropology, sociology, ergonomics, political science, education, philosophy, etc. Within-psychology areas pertinent to cyberpsychology include almost all the specialties, the major ones: developmental, cognitive, clinical, social, differential, educational, work psychology, psychophysiology, etc., as well as less common: forensic, mathematical, personnel, sport psychology, psychological rehabilitation, etc. All the enumerated interconnections are worth of detailed discussion; the brief lecture course gives a chance to no more than mention the most evident common themes.

Different schools in psychology suggest specific methodological, empirical, and explanatory approaches toward cyberpsychology-related empirical studies. To name just a few, these are the *theory of cognitive development* founded by Jean Piaget, the *cultural historical psychology* originated by Lev Vygotsky, and the newborn – born within the last decade – *positive psychology* headed by Martin Seligman. These three schools of thought combine both constructivist and humanistic theories. Several selected examples of studies in cyberpsychology characteristic for these three theories will be presented during the brief lecture course.

Preferred reading:

Barak, A., Suler, J. Reflections on the Psychology and Social Science of Cyberspace. *Psychological Aspects of Cyberspace: Theory, Research, Applications*. A. Barak (ed.). Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 1-9. Available online at

<http://gsb.haifa.ac.il/~sheizaf/cyberpsych/01-Barak&Suler.pdf>

Kuutti, K., Kaptelinin, V. *Rethinking Cognitive Tools: From Augmentation to Mediation* (Extended Abstract). 1997. (2 pages). Available online at

<http://csdl2.computer.org/comp/proceedings/ct/1997/8084/00/80840031.pdf>

Turkle, Sh. *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*. N.Y.: Touchstone Book, 1984, pp. 30-32 & 326-332.